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Hallucinogen

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Hallucinogen
ADAM ZITTEL

When my mother pours coral snakes into my cereal bowl, I close my eyes, ignoring the hissing and the fangs piercing my wrists and forearms, and concentrate on what I know must be, until one by one they subside back into cornflakes.

This is how it has always been.

In school, a tall, gaunt, black man with dreadlocks past his shoulders rants at us about the man and how he's keeping cocaine down. I peek at my neighbors notes. Biology. Cell division. My neighbor lets me copy his notes because he thinks I am nearsighted. This is ok.

Reality is a slippery thing. We can never really be sure if we're "with it" or not. All we know is what our brains tell us. Your brain is telling you that thing you just put in your mouth is pasta. It could be day old dog shit, and you'd have no idea, because your brain is saying "This pasta you're chewing on is delicious!" For me, reality isn't about finding what is; it's returning to what should be.

The light fixtures should not have little glowing beings inside them, pounding on thin glass walls until their tiny hands bleed.

The second hand on the clock should not be whirling backwards.

The cafeteria lady should not have a third eye on her forehead, glancing around furtively and blinking furiously.

But these are little things. They do not affect my functionality. I do not waste focus removing them.

My focus is needed elsewhere.

At lunch, a friend of mine walks by and stabs me with a wicked looking dagger, burying it up to the hilt in my side. I struggle not to cry out, hobble to the bathroom, and focus.

I know this knife is not here.

I know my side is smooth and unmarred.

And, in a few minutes, I am simply a student in the bathroom, washing their face.

When, while adjusting my chair, I accidentally put the leg through the eye of the pale, hairless face that has sprouted from the linoleum, and it begins screaming in agony, I close my eyes and breath. I cannot hear the teacher over this screaming, a teacher who my neighbor's notes confirm as real. There is no face. Only boring, grey linoleum. I hold this image in my mind, labeling it as what should be. In a moment, it is what is.

In my last class of the day, the teacher opens a vein in her arm, and begins to write the calculus equations we've been studying in blood on the board. The smell of blood hits my nose like a wave of copper, but the equations hold true, and I copy them down dutifully, breathing through my mouth.

At home, I close my eyes as I walk up the steps to our front door. Perception of reality cannot trump physics, and the stairs are uneventful. I have done this many times. The front door, as well, has been sculpted into muscle memory. The seventeen steps to my bedroom are old friends. In my bedroom, I place my backpack in the corner, open my closet door, and lay on my bed as dragonflies the size of dinner plates begin pouring out. The deep hum of their bright wings blurring fills my bones as they circle below the ceiling, a helix of muted gleams and whirling kaleidoscopes. I open my mouth, let the sound stream into my lungs and sinuses, feel it echoing through my cavities and pouring out new, and changed. This warm, resonant vibration that makes my tissues crackle as they stretch past old inertia, and this, this is why I leave those little white cages in their white plastic bottle, this is why I hold them in my cheek every time they force feed me, this is life, this is love, and it happening inside my head doesn't stop it from being any less real.